

leaders. But he sees "their passive endurance" as a reason for their not having better rulers. "Russia is doomed to be governed by fools."

This book, too late for Russia, is still in time for us if we heed its warning. And if we cannot reverse the trend of corrupt bureaucracy by taking personal responsibility, why then, like Russia, we too are "doomed to be governed by fools."

- **HOFFER'S AMERICA** by James D. Koerner (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1973), 137 pages, \$5.95.

Reviewed by Allan C. Brownfeld

WHEN *The True Believer* was published in 1951, the name of its author, Eric Hoffer, was unknown. Readers of the book recognized, however, that a powerful and original talent had made its appearance and were even more astonished to learn that Hoffer was a common laborer who had been blind in childhood, who had then recovered his eyesight and had proceeded to educate himself entirely by his own efforts.

Now, twenty years later, after six additional books, Hoffer is recognized as a brilliant aphorist and a provocative commentator upon men and events. In this new book,

one of Hoffer's close friends, James D. Koerner, himself a distinguished author, attempts to satisfy the curiosity of Hoffer's readers as to his current opinion of things — and to stimulate the interest of those who have not yet encountered him. In both of these attempts he is notably successful.

Why, for example, have we not heard more from Eric Hoffer in recent years? The reason relates to the income tax laws and to Hoffer's feeling that the conduct of the Internal Revenue Service is inherently unjust and tends to stifle all initiative.

Hoffer still remembers with some bitterness how much of the income he earned in his best year, \$180,000, went to the government. He states that, "I make more money when I don't write than when I do." At the end of that year he had about \$11,000 left and he proposed to make it a clean sweep and give the rest to the University of California to establish an essay prize. Now he tries to shield his estate and his family from taxes by limiting his publication to a book every other year. As he puts it, "I am supposed to lay a tiny little egg every two years. I laid one in 1971, so the next one is now 1973."

Hoffer's is a firm voice for individualism and for freedom from coercion by the state. As he sees the American past, it was personal

liberty — and the heavy burden of work that it imposes on each man — that gave the ordinary American the scope he needed to excel. Whether he used that freedom to build a giant fortune, join a hundred organizations, cut himself off from much of society, or pursue whatever else he had set his mind on, it was the combination of freedom and responsibility that, in Hoffer's view, made the American achievement possible.

For Hoffer, the freedom to be left alone, to be free of coercion by the state or society, has always been critical. When he first traveled from New York to California as a young man, he "looked around," as he puts it, "and I liked what I saw. This was a country in which you could be left alone . . . This country was made largely by people who wanted to be left alone. Those who couldn't thrive when left to themselves never felt at ease in America."

According to Hoffer's theory, the problem of coping with personal freedom is particularly severe in America because personal freedom is so complete. The burden of freedom, and the ways in which people try to cope with it, is a central theme through all of his writings.

Hoffer laments the decline of the work ethic and sees this decline in such phenomena as featherbedding by labor unions, in books full of

misprints, in the surliness of clerks. "If we lose the sense of work and purpose," he says, "we will become a weak nation, a poor nation, and we will cease to be a fighting nation and that will be the end of us."

The increase in violent crime in the U.S. is, Hoffer believes, the direct consequence of a disabling fear that has overtaken most Americans. He believes that a stable society, like a stable individual, is the product of an equilibrium in which a tendency to crime and violence is held firmly in check by a more dominant force. Weaken or remove that force and evil will reign. In a free society that force is represented by the readiness of the majority to resist and punish the minority who are violent and who want to exploit any sign of timidity or weakness.

Hoffer cites the cliché, poverty causes crime, then comments: "That is what they are always shoving down our throats . . . Poverty does *not* cause crime. If it did we would have been buried in crime for most of our history and so would every other nation on earth." He observes that he has lived for most of his life with poor people who did not commit crimes. "Criminals cause crime," he declares, "And the minute we let them get away with it, we are going to have lots more."

Hoffer recalls the occasion when

he was a member of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence and a black spokesman appeared as a witness and said such things as, "We are full of rage" and he replied: "Mister, it is easy to be full of rage. It is not so easy to go to work and build something." When a militant white student would appear to complain about the administration's abridgement of the right of students to dissent, he would heatedly reply, "It is people like you who destroy everybody else's right to dissent. We have more democracy on the waterfront than radicals allow on the Berkeley campus."

To those who ask preferential quotas for minorities he responds that to treat anyone "more equal than equal" is to treat him as an inferior. He finds it astonishing that minorities demanding special attention fail to grasp the elementary truth that they are demanding to be patronized.

The arrogance of American "intellectuals" is a subject which brings forth a vigorous response from Eric Hoffer. To Hoffer, the touchstone of the intellectual is not a passion for truth but a passion for power, especially power over people. The sine qua non of the Hoffer intellectual is his conviction that he belongs to an educated minority whose duty it is to instruct the rest of mankind and if

necessary compel them to be better than they are. According to Hoffer, one need not be particularly intelligent to be an "intellectual." He notes that, "In their hearts American intellectuals have always hated the ordinary man . . . They have never been able to accept the fact that the riffraff of Europe were able to tame the American continent and build the world's best and greatest nation largely without the guidance of intellectuals."

That, of course, is just a tiny bit of Eric Hoffer. His book is certainly a dose of good medicine for America.

► **HOW TO TEACH CHILDREN TWICE AS MUCH** by Allan E. Harrison (New Rochelle, N. Y.: Arlington House, 1973), 153 pp., \$6.95.

► **HOW TO TUTOR** by Samuel L. Blumenfeld (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1973), 298 pp., \$9.95.

Reviewed by Melvin D. Barger

IT'S NOT HARD to build a case proving that the teaching efficiency of the public school system is low. Some of the system's most outspoken critics have been teachers, although teachers' remedies